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SUBJECT Fidel Castro Interview: Part 2

ROBERT MACNEIL: Tonight we have part two of our newsmaker interview with Cuban President Fidel Castro. It is the first major American television interview Castro has given in six years. It was recorded last weekend in Havana.

Last week White House spokesman Larry Speakes said that one of the obstacles the Reagan Administration sees to improved relations with Castro is what Speakes called violations of human rights in Cuba. I asked Castro about that.

[Castro speaks through a translator]

FIDEL CASTRO: Which are the violations of human rights in Cuba. Tell me which. Invent one. Do we have disappeared people here?

Look, if the United States...

MACNEIL: Well, let me give -- you asked. I'll give you an example of what is said. For instance, human rights organizations, like the Amnesty International, estimate that you have up to 1000 political prisoners still in your jails here.

Do you have political prisoners still in jail in Cuba?

CASTRO: Yes, we have them. We have a few hundreds political prisoners. Is that a violation of human rights?

MACNEIL: In democracies it is considered a violation of human rights to imprison somebody for his political beliefs.

CASTRO: I will give you an example. In Spain there are

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many Basque nationalists in prison. They're not political prisoners? What are they? Because you also have to analyze what is a political prisoner and what is not a political prisoner.

Now then, those that committed crimes during Batista's time, did we have the right to put them into trial or not? Okay. Those that invaded Cuba through [unintelligible]. Did we have the right to try them? Oh, no. Those that became CIA agents, those that placed bombs, those that brought about the deaths of peasants, workers, teachers. Do we have the right to put them into court or not? Those who, in agreement with a foreign power like the United States and backed by the United States and inspired by the United States, conspires in our country and struggles and fights against our people and its revolution --because this revolution is not of a minority. This is a revolution of the overwhelming majority of the people. What are these people? What are they, political prisoners?

Those that have infiltrated through our coasts, those that have been trained by the CIA to kill, to place bombs, do we have the right to put them to trial or not? Are they political prisoners?

They are something more than political prisoners. They are traitors to the homeland.

MACNEIL: Is there anybody in jail simply because his political beliefs are -- he dissents from you politically?

CASTRO: No one. Not because of political beliefs, nor because of religious beliefs, that are in prison.

MACNEIL: After Jesse Jackson came here last summer, you released 26 political prisoners. Are you going to release more of the kinds you were describing a moment ago?

CASTRO: Of course we cannot be willing to release them. It's a bit under 200, actually, on that situation. These are people who are potentially dangerous. We're not going to release them and send them to the United States for them to organize plans against Cuba, or for them to go to Nicaragua or Honduras or Central America as mercenaries, or as a guerrilla for any country, to prepare attacks, so that when I visit these countries, as they have done on other occasions, organizing a true human hunt. That's the psychology instilled in them by the CIA and the U.S. authorities.

MACNEIL: The other human rights question that is raised by the United States is that you don't have a free press. Your revolution is now 26 years old. It's very stable. In your recent speeches you've told of how successful it is. Why

wouldn't you feel confident about allowing a press to have a full expression of ideas and discussion and opposition?

CASTRO: Well, you are right. We do not have a press system like that of the United States. In the United States there is private property over the mass media. The mass media belong to private enterprises. They are the ones who say the last word.

Here, there is no private property over the mass media. There's social property. And it has been, is, and will be at the service of the revolution.

Here, we do not have any multiparty system, either, nor do we need it. The political level of our people, the information level of our people is much greater. In surveys that have been made in the United States, an astonishingly high number of people do not know where Nicaragua is, where the countries of Latin America are. They don't know what countries belong to Africa, what countries belong to Asia. There is an incredible ignorance, astonishing. That does not happen here.

Your system might be wonderful. But we -- at least the results of ours are better, undoubtedly.

MACNEIL: May I raise a point? Your system, which you say works very well, it does presuppose that the leadership of the country, you, are always right, that you are infallible. Is that not so?

CASTRO: No, it does not presuppose that, because we're not as dogmatic as a church -- although we have been dogmatic. And we have never preached the cult of personality. You will not see a statue of me anywhere, nor a school with my name, nor a street, nor a little town, nor any type of personality cult, because we have taught our people to -- we have not taught our people -- we have not taught our people to believe, but to think, to reason out. We have a people that thinks, that thinks. It's not a people that believes, but rather that reason out, that think. And they might either agree or disagree with me. In general, the overwhelming majority has agreed, has been in agreement.

Why? Because we have always been honest. We have always told the truth. These people know that from the government a lie has never been told to them.

And I ask you to go to the world, tour the world and go to the United States and ask if they can say what I can say, that I have never told a lie to the people.

And these are the reasons why there's confidence. Not

because I have made -- have become a statue or an idol, but rather simply because of the fact that they trust me.

And I have very, very few prerogatives in this country. I do not appoint ministers nor vice ministers nor directors of ministries nor ambassadors. I don't appoint anybody. That's the way it is. We have a system, a system for the selection of the cadre based on their capacity, etcetera. I have less power, a hundred times less power than the President of the United States, who can even declare war, and nuclear war.

MACNEIL: But doesn't the system mean that the revolution is always right?

CASTRO: You, when you made your independence wars, you did not even free the slaves, and said that you were a democratic country. You, for 150 years, did not even allow a black man to participate and be part of a baseball team or a basketball team, to enter a club, to go to a white children's school. And you said it was a democracy.

None of those things exist here, neither racial discrimination nor discrimination due to sex. It is the most fair, egalitarian society there has ever been in this hemisphere. So we consider that it is superior to yours. But you believe that yours is the best, without any discussions whatsoever. Although there might be multimillionaires and people barefooted, begging in the streets, without any homes, people unemployed, and you believe it's perfect. Because you believe things, things that I don't think that that type of society is perfect, really.

I think that ours is better. We have defended a better and more just society. We believe in it. Now, we make a mistake. But whenever we make a mistake, we have the courage to explain it. We have the courage to admit it, to recognize it, acknowledge it, to criticize it.

I believe that very few -- there are mighty few people, like the leaders of a revolution, who are able to acknowledge their mistakes. And I first of all acknowledge it before myself, because I am first of all more critical with myself than with anybody else. But I'm critical before my people, critical before the world, the U.S., everybody.

But don't worry. If this analysis had not been correct, the revolution would not be in power. The revolution would not be in power.

MACNEIL: How do you measure that? How do you, as the leader of this country, know that for so sure, when you don't have the vehicles for public expression and open discussion of

issues that the democracies have, for example? How do you know that the people feel that way?

CASTRO: We have a party with almost half a million members. They're everywhere, in every factory. We know more than the United States about the things that happen there.

MACNEIL: But isn't the dynamic, isn't the dynamic of a one-party state that the instruction and information goes downwards. And if people disagree with it, they don't dare say so? And so dissent which may exist doesn't come back up the system.

CASTRO: Actually, we know what there is and we know the way our people think much better than what the President of the United States knows about the way the U.S. people think. You should have no doubt whatsoever about that. We have many ways of knowing this. The facts prove it.

Let's suppose that people might not agree with the revolution. How could we have millions of people organized to defend the country? How could we have an armed people?

Tell the South Africans, the South African friends that they give the weapons to the blacks in South Africa. Tell your friend Pinochet to give the weapons to the people of Chile. Tell your friends in Paraguay or in Haiti to give the weapons to the masses, to the people. Tell many of the friends that you have in Europe, you who speak of democracy.

And the first and the most important form of democracy is for the citizens to feel part of power and part of the state. And how do we prove this? We have an armed people, men and women, millions of people. If they would not be in agreement with the government, they could solve things rapidly. We would not be able to stay in power for 24 minutes. Do you want more proof of that?

MACNEIL: I have seen it reported that, increasingly, Cuban troops are refusing to go for service in Angola, that the families of troops who are there and have been there are getting more and more unhappy over the Angolan experience. Is that true? That you're feeling public pressure to end this?

CASTRO: For revolutionaries to fulfill an international mission is something that is considered a great honor, and that should not make anyone feel strange about it, when people have motivation and when people have ideals. Of course, that implies sacrifices. It implies sacrifices from families, as they separate from their relatives for a certain period of time. In some cases, it means risks, undoubtedly, and it means sacrifices.

But our people can carry on these missions because they are prepared to do so.

MACNEIL: How many have been killed in Angola?

CASTRO: That question has already been asked by a journalist, and I told him I was not going to answer the question. Because our rule has been that we would not publish the number, that the enemy should not have that information. And we are maintaining it secret. Someday all of that might be published.

The family knows when there's a loss. They are informed about it immediately.

MACNEIL: But isn't it a matter of public interest and the concern of the Cuban public as a whole, the cost in lives of your activity in Angola?

CASTRO: No, no. They know well that this is a policy that is followed and that it is a correct one, because we base ourselves on the confidence and the support of the revolutionary policy by the people.

MACNEIL: Tell me an example of a mistake you feel you made and admitted.

CASTRO: In politics we have committed few mistakes, fortunately. We have been quite wise in the decisions we have made.

In the economic field we made mistakes, and these were mistakes that resulted from our ignorance because, in general, revolutionaries have ideas, very noble ideas: to have education, to have health for all, to have work, to have jobs, to have development. That is, very noble ideas, but very general.

MACNEIL: You said in your speech to the National Assembly, "We do not become capitalists." Do you begin to lean a little capitalist?

CASTRO: On the contrary, totally the contrary. I'm increasingly happier, mentally, spiritually, philosophically, of capitalism [sic]. Every day, I'm more convinced about the advantages of the socialist system over capitalism, more convinced about the fact that capitalism has no future. Well, I say no future on a long-term basis. I'm not saying that capitalism will disappear in ten years. But the present capitalist system is no longer the capitalist system of the past century.

MACNEIL: Aren't you allowing creeping private enter-

prise, to permit free markets where vegetables and food and things can be wold by the people who -- to open new supermarkets where goods, consumer goods which are otherwise scarce are priced at full market prices and not at supported prices? Is this not creeping private enterprise?

CASTRO: When you asked about mistakes, I said that in politics we had not. But you did not allow me to continue, because you asked me other things. But that item was not dealt with.

In the development of the economy, where at the beginning we did not have any experience, and where we even had an attitude of certain disregard for the experiences of other socialist countries, actually, we were a bit self-sufficient. Actually, this is something that has happened to many revolutionaries. At times they believe that they know more than the rest.

In the economic field we made mistakes, which we call idealistic mistakes. In essence, these were of wanting to jump over historic stages and trying to get to a more egalitarian society, even more egalitarian. We had gotten to the point of distributing almost to depending on the needs of the people, not according to their work, the amount and quality of their work.

When we came to the point of understanding that that had negative effects, that our society was not yet a society with the necessary communist culture and consciousness, we rectified things.

But it's not that we are leaning to capitalism. The more I analyze today's world, Third World, and even the problems of the industrialized countries, unemployment has not been solved. In Europe unemployment is growing yearly. And you can plan, and they can plan how many unemployed they can have in 1990 and the year 2000.

The deeper I think and the deeper I meditate, the least capitalist I feel.

MACNEIL: Can we move to defense? In the last year or so, you have greatly increased, as you said, your military capacity. You said on January 2nd you've increased your weapons, the number of weapons by three times. You have roughly a quarter of a million men on active duty, 190,000 reserves, a million people as militia -- 190,000.

My question is, my question is, why does Cuba need this very large armed force?

CASTRO: Of course, I will rectify something. Armed

forces and reserves are more than half a million. Militia, territorial troops, over one million. We have tripled the number of weapons, but we have multiplied many times our resistance capability by changing the conception.

In the past, the conception was the army and the reserve are the ones to defend the country. The conception is all of the people today defend the country, in every corner, in every city, in the countryside, in mountains. And they're actually organized. The idea is that every citizen in this country is armed.

MACNEIL: Is this a lesson from Grenada?

CASTRO: No. After Grenada we intensified it. Yes. The Nicaraguans also. The Grenada thing did not weaken us. It actually made us feel stronger and multiplied our determination and our will and our readiness to become stronger and fight.

You asked why so many weapons? The United States, our adversary, being such a powerful country, the country that harasses us, the country that blockades us, the country that threatens us by invading us, through an invasion, they don't understand why we make this effort? The country that is investing in peace [sic] \$313 billion, one-third of the budget, taking that away from ill people, from aged? We don't do that. At least we don't do that. And they don't understand that us, being neighbors of the United States and feeling threatened by facts and the words of the United States, that we make an effort to defend ourselves? Actually, do we have to explain that?

MACNEIL: You had an invasion scare last fall, last autumn. You had exercises. You had people, including children, digging air raid trenches. Have you relaxed now? Are you now not fearing an American invasion?

CASTRO: Look, we were relaxed, we are relaxed, and we will always be relaxed. We have been for 26 years relaxed. That's one thing.

Another thing. The measures we have taken to defend ourselves, we are not going to wait for a government of the United States to decide to attack the country for us to then start preparing ourselves? We have prepared ourselves, we are preparing ourselves, and we will continue preparing ourselves always.

So, hypothetically, if the United States were to become, let's say, in the world -- not a socialist country, let's say a Marxist-Leninist country and more communist than the U.S.S.R. and China, we, here next to the United States, would not disregard our defenses. It is a philosophical principle.

If one day...

MACNEIL: So one of your -- excuse me for interrupting. So one of your motives for seeking or suggesting improved relations with the United States is not so that you can relax your military investment.

[Technical difficulties]

CASTRO: Do you ask if I feel any frustration? No. I have no frustration. I feel no frustration whatsoever.

I can tell you this directly. We have done more than what we dreamed of doing. Many of the things we're doing now, we had some general idea, but not as precise and concrete as we have now. I can tell you that reality has surpassed our dream, in what we have done. And we're not speaking about the future.

It's not the same as at the beginning, that we spoke of our good intentions, but rather we now speak with a revolution that has been made after 26 years. And it has certain advantages not to speak of things that we were intending to do, but rather to speak of things that have been done.

MACNEIL: Finally, let me ask you a couple of personal questions, if I may.

Do you want to go on being the President of Cuba until you die?

CASTRO: It depends on how many years I live. If I'm told that I can be now, I would say, yes, I think I can be. If I could not do my job, because of the experience I have now, I would also tell you that.

I think that I am useful. I don't think I am indispensable. Nothing opposes my philosophy more than that. I believe we have done a lasting work that goes beyond us, beyond all of us. And if it were not so, why have we worked so much? If it were not so, we would have failed.

But our work is not a work of stone, is not of materials, but of consciousness, of moral values. And that is lasting.

Either being President or not being President, I'm fully hopeful that the others will be better. And the sooner a new generation that is better than us comes, a more capable one to replace us, the better. If we live three, four, five years, maybe ten, I don't know. But the day when I do not feel, really, because of my physical capabilities or mental capabilities, that

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I could fulfill my duty and do my work, I will be the first to say it. If I live many years, you can be sure that I will not die as the President of this country. And the first that would not want that, for sure, it's me. If I want my mind to maintain itself clear and illuminated, it's precisely to come to that very minute, to that very minute in which I'm able to notice that I have already done my work, and that others can do it.

So, if I tell you now that I will resign, I'm a soldier of the revolution and I think I can still struggle. But I have no personal affection for honors and power or force, or the force in power.

You have a President that is older. Maybe at that age I do not have the physical or mental capabilities to do my work.

MACNEIL: Tomorrow night Fidel Castro predicts violent political explosions in Latin America. And we have an official U.S. response from Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kenneth Dam.